Jesus, God and Shepherd

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Preacher: Phil Martin

[0:00] The reading today is taken from Mark chapter 6, verses 30 to 52, and that's on page 1015 of the church Bibles.

Jesus feeds the 5,000. The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.
For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.
When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.
And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, this is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat.
[1:08] But he answered them, you give them something to eat. And they said to him, shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat? And he said to them, how many loaves do you have?

Go and see. And when they had found out, they said, five and two fish. Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. And they sat down in groups by hundreds and by fifties.
And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people.
And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up the twelve baskets full of broken pieces and the fish.
And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side of Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd.
[2:09] And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea and he was alone on the land.

And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.
But immediately he spoke to them and said, Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.
And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. And we pray that you would be doing that work among us now.
In Jesus' name, amen. The subject today is the identity of Jesus. And I just want to show us that this is the subject of this whole section of Mark.
[3:43] So if you've got your Bible open there, turn back to chapter 4, verse 41. Can you see that there? Chapter 4, verse 41.

The disciples ask this question, who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? Now flick to chapter 8, verse 29.
Verse 29. And you'll see the end of this section, it's a kind of bookend. Jesus asks his disciples, in verse 29, but who do you say I am?
Can you see, this is the issue of this whole section of Mark's gospel, chapter 4 to 8. And I suppose more to the point is this question, who did Jesus think he was?
Now this is hugely important. I remember many conversations with people who have got the idea that Jesus, the figure of history, didn't think that he was the person that his disciples then went off

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and said he was.
[5:04] Have you heard that idea? Immortalised famously in the film Life of Brian, the accidental Messiah. The idea is that it was actually the disciples who decided that he was God, and perhaps most of all Paul, the Apostle Paul, who embellished and elevated Jesus' claims.

Paul certainly leaves us in no doubt who he thinks Jesus was, Romans chapter 9. Jesus the Christ, who is God and Lord over all.
But who did Jesus think he was? We come now to the only miracle that is repeated in all four gospels. That is, if Jesus did any miracles at all, it was this one, the feeding of the 5,000.
Now having thought about this miracle a little bit over the last few weeks, the more it seems to me that there is something climactic here about this miracle. Jesus has been revealing more and more of himself throughout Mark's gospel about his identity.
But as we come to the feeding of the 5,000, it is as if that is the climactic moment in his revelation of his identity. Both of these miracles go together.
[6:27] You can see that in verse 6, verse 52. They did not understand about the loaves. Their hearts were hardened. So both of these miracles go together.

And they are both what you might call the first unnecessary miracles in Mark. And what I mean by that is the crowds could have dispersed and gone to the surrounding villages to be fed.
They could have gone home. It wasn't exactly necessary for Jesus to feed them miraculously.
Neither was it necessary for Jesus to walk on water.
The disciples weren't drowning. It was just difficult sailing conditions. But they were making their steady way. He could have just got in the boat with them from the start. These are the only two, I suggest, the only two unnecessary miracles in Mark.
And this tells us something. And I think it tells us that these miracles are the most deliberate revelation of his identity in the whole gospel.
[7:33] We'll come to that in a moment. Before we do, we should just pause on this question of did it happen? Now there may be some people among us today looking into the Christian faith.

That's great. And it's the right question to ask. Did this happen? If it didn't happen, we should all just go home. There's no point. Did it happen?
Well, we could spend a long time on this. We don't have time. Come and speak to me afterwards. I'd love to talk to you about it if that's your particular question. But just for the moment, look down and see it is historically located in verse 45.
Immediately, the disciples get into the boat and they go before him to the other side to Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd. Now, Bethsaida is a real place on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee.
It existed then. It still exists today. The whole account has an eyewitness ring. Did you see that? That they get in the boat.
[8:34] That they're tired after lots of days of going around villages. They get in the boat and they head for somewhere where there's no people. We all know that feeling.

Needing a bit of rest. But Jesus is famous by this point. And the paparazzi are everywhere. So look down at verse 33.
Many saw them going and recognized them. It's not hard for someone to have seen the boat that they got into and then just followed its very obvious course around the lake.
Spreading the word as they go. Look, they're going that way. And so a whole crowd starts to run and keep up and is ready for them when they get there. And then we have the miracle.
Now, what actually happened to the bread? Have you thought about this as it was read? Verse 41. Jesus divided it. Divided the fish among them all. He blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people.
[9:41] Now, what actually happened to the bread is tantalizingly vague. You ever wondered? We got any logistics people here? You know, what was the arrangement?

When did the bread multiply? Did it happen? Did each of the disciples take half a loaf of bread, a bit of it, and some fish?
And as they handed it out, it reappeared in their hands every time. Or was there like a central basket with the five loaves and the two fish?
And as the disciples reached in, it just kept giving and kept giving and never ran out. Almost likely, and someone pointed this out to me this week, he gave it again and again.

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Do you see? It was him who gave it. Verse 41. He gave it to the disciples to set before the people. However the bread multiplied, it happened.
[10:44] 5,000 people. Very, very hard for a story like this to circulate within the lifetime of these people and gain any traction if it didn't happen. There were some ridiculous ideas going around about it.

People suggesting, oh, well, you know, everyone had brought their own packed lunch, and so they thought, well, now's the time to eat. So they brought it all out, and it was as if 5,000 were fed by Jesus. Well, that's nonsense, I'm afraid.
No one would have considered it a miracle. And so the story would have gained no traction as it was circulated in the lifetimes of the people who were supposed to be there. It happened.
Much more reasonable in the context of everything else that Jesus did to conclude this was another demonstration of the extraordinary power of Jesus. What is he saying?
And there are two points, I think, that he's saying through this miracle, these two miracles. Number one, he is the God of the Old Testament. I want to take us back very briefly to a promise in the Old Testament that should shed some light on this.
[11:55] If you turn back in your Bibles to Ezekiel 34, verse 11. And so it's on page 873.

Page 873 in your Bibles. We can do this. Page 873.
Ezekiel 34, verse 11. This is a promise that God made. For thus says the Lord, Behold, I, I myself, will search for my sheep and will seek them out.
As a shepherd seeks out his flock, when he is among his sheep that have been scattered. So I will seek out my sheep and I will rescue them from all the places where they've been scattered.
Verse 14. I will feed them with good pasture. Verse 15. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep and I myself will make them lie down.
[12:54] Verse 16. I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strayed. This is God speaking of a day when he would come one day to be the shepherd of his people in person.

Now come back to Mark 6. And look at verse 34. Jesus gets out of the boat.
He sees this great crowd. He has compassion on them. Why? Because they are like sheep without a shepherd. In the first Exodus.
Do you remember the first Exodus when God rescued his people out of Egypt? He shepherded his people through Moses and rescued them from Egypt.
He brought them through the Red Sea as on dry land. Their feet walked through the water as on dry land. He gave them bread from heaven to sustain them in the desert.
[14:00] As they journeyed towards the promised land. When they got to the promised land, he shepherded his people through David. The shepherd king.

But David sinned and failed and everything went wrong. In the prophets, God said, as we've just read. I, I myself will come and shepherd my people.
And I will bring a second Exodus rescue. This time, it will be forever. I don't think we can understand this miracle without the Old Testament backgrounds.
But Jesus, as he looks round. As a shepherd at his sheep. Verse 34. As he provides bread for them in the desert.
The desolate place. Looking up to heaven as he does it. Verse 41. As he provides food from nowhere with. He himself does it with the power that only the creator has.
[15:05] As he sends off his disciples in a boat so that he might walk on water. Demonstrating his lordship over creation and its laws.

And then verse 50. As he says, look down with me at verse 50. As he says, take heart. It is I. Or literally, take heart.
I am. The name of God from the Old Testament. Exodus 3. I am who I am. Take heart. I am.
As he does all of these things. What is he saying? Behold. Here I am. The Lord God himself. Come to shepherd my people. Just as I promised I would. There are two ways you can tell someone who you are.
[16:03] You can say it. And you can show it. I mean, anyone applying for a job. It is not enough just to say, hi, you know. I am Phil Martin. You have to show it. You know, here is my passport.

Here is whatever else. Which one is more powerful? I had one of those moments last week. When someone calls your name. Who you haven't seen for 20 years.

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So we were playing cricket in Brockwell Park Nets. Me and the boys. And someone shouts, Phil. And it is this guy from school, Steve.
We were pretty good mates. And we used to play cricket together, actually. Now, after 20 years, did he know who I was? Because I said, hi, I am Phil.
No, he recognized me. How did he recognize me? Through watching my inimitable left arm spin. That he was so familiar with.
[17:01] And through seeing my face. Well, it is the same here. Yes, Jesus does say it. Verse 50. I am.

But mainly, he shows it. Because that is more powerful. And he says, do you recognize me? Notice the bookends. Of this section. Verse 33. They recognized them. Verse 54.
54. Immediately. They recognized him. Mark only uses that word twice in the gospel. To describe the reaction of people.
What's he saying? Do you recognize him? Can you see him? So who does Jesus think he is?
[18:04] Jesus thinks he's the God of the Old Testament. Come to shepherd his people. The disciples did not invent it. They realized it. They finally understood it.

And then spent their lives proclaiming it. Now, maybe you find this so hard to grasp. That Jesus could be God.
I do. It's mind bending, isn't it? Mind blowing. Well, if that's us. We're in good company. Verse 52. The disciples did not understand about the loaves.
Why? Because it's hard to grasp this. The idea that the God who made this universe. Who spoke. And everything came into being. Who stretched out the heavens with a span of his hand. The idea that that God. Could take human form.
[19:06] And come down. It's not easy for us to understand. But it is the heart of the claim of the gospel. As to who Jesus is.

Well, secondly. Why does all this matter? It matters because he has come as a shepherd. Who provides for his people. Imagine having God as your shepherd.
Who loves you. If God is our shepherd. That gets very exciting. Very quickly. Before we ask what provision he gives.
What his provision is. What he provides. Notice who his provision is for. Verse 34. He went ashore and saw a great crowd. He had compassion on them.
Because they were like sheep without a shepherd. That is his provision is for the spiritually lost. Jesus looks at these people. A huge crowd.
[20:09] Of normal people. He could be looking at people in Dulwich Park. Or in the city. Or in your school. Normal people. With jobs.

Families. 5,000 of them. That's just the men. Problems. Struggles. Sadnesses. Happy memories. Sad memories. Hopes. Dreams. Normal people. But what he saw is not what we might see. He saw sheep without a shepherd.
I asked one of our kids. What he thought would happen. If to a sheep without a farmer. He said and I quote immediately. He said it would probably just run off and die.
Well that's true isn't it. What does Jesus mean. Well we may have good jobs. We may not. We may have prospects.
[21:10] We may be generally happy. We may be struggling with depression. We may be poor. We may be rich. We may be somewhere in the middle. We may have many friends.

We may have few. We may have a family who loves us. We may be lonely. But we all have one thing in common. Spiritually.
By nature. We are sheep. Without a shepherd. And when it comes to the most important truths about reality. We have no idea. We are clueless.
Jesus says. By nature. Lost. Heading for hell. Heading for hell. Because of our sin. Like sheep. Without a shepherd. But God. Has come. With compassion. In his eyes. What has he come to provide?
[22:10] He's come to provide himself. The point here is. Not that they are. They ate the bread. And were satisfied. That they ate some sandwiches.

They could have gone to the surrounding villages. And bought it. The point is. That they ate the bread. That Jesus provided. And were satisfied. It is only Christ.

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Who provides the bread. That we need. We won't find it anywhere else. We won't find it in the city. But what is this bread? What does the bread symbolize?
Well in its simplest form. It is a picture I think. Of the provision of all of our needs. Now and forever. They were satisfied. But at heart.
It is himself. Our last paper chase today. Come with me. To chapter 14. Of Mark. Verse 22.
[23:08] See if you notice. Any similarities here. The night before his death. The night before his death. Jesus. Did this with his disciples.

As they were eating. He took bread. After blessing it. He broke it. And gave it to them. And said. Take. This is my body. Come back to.
Verse 41. He blesses. And breaks the loaves. And gives it to them. What is the point?
Well as Jesus. Breaks the bread. For the 5,000. He says. Here I am. The great provider. For my people.
But on that last night. Before he died. As he blesses. And breaks the bread. On that night. Before his death. And gives it to his disciples. Saying this is my body. He says.
[24:09] The heart of my provision. For you. Is myself. Can you see that? Can you see what he's saying? The bread is symbolic.

Of himself. The heart of his provision. Is his death on the cross. To pay the price. For your sin. And for mine.
To provide our need. Of forgiveness. And restored relationship. With God. Forever. Permanent provision. For the lost sheep.
Peace with God. So why is this miracle. In every gospel. Why is this miracle. In every gospel. I think no other miracle.
I think it's because. No other miracle. Brings the heart. Of Jesus's identity. That he is God. And the heart. Of his mission. That he came to die for sin.
[25:09] Together. Into one. This miracle. Above any other. Enables the Christian. To sing. Amazing love. How can it be.

That you. My God. Should die for me. Pause. To consider. The love of God. Is God.
A bully. Is he a tyrant. Is God against you. What we know. Nothing of the true God. If that's who we think he is. Open your eyes.
And see who God really is. The God who came down. To give himself. For you. Pause to consider. The breadth.
Of God's love. 5,000 people. There is no lack. 12 baskets left over. Abundance of supply. What does this mean?
[26:05] It means that his. Provision. His forgiveness. Is for any who would come to him. The free provision of himself. For your forgiveness. And for mine. There's no limit.

To his provision. Anyone. Can come to Jesus Christ. And find. Forgiveness. So firstly. He provides himself.
Secondly. He provides. His word. To guide. And we see that. In verse 34.
When he went ashore. He saw a great crowd. And he had compassion on them. Because they were like sheep. Without a shepherd. And he fed them with bread. No. And he began to teach them.
Many things. So what is the thing. That spiritually lost sheep. Need most. Two things. They need his death.
[27:06] And they need his word. It is through. His word. The Bible. That Jesus. Feeds. And leads. His people.

Come to Jesus. And ask him. To teach you. Through his word. He will provide. That if anyone's. Feeling like.
You just open the Bible. And we read it. And we don't understand it. Well. Pray. Jesus loves to teach. And provide. For his sheep. In that way. We may think that.
We need all kinds of things. In life. All kinds of pressures. And anxieties. Coming from the things. That we think we need. What is the thing. We need most. His word.
And so let me ask you. Is Jesus' word. At the center of your life. Jesus looks out. On this city. With compassion. In his eyes.
[28:02] Sheep. Without a shepherd. What do they need? They need. The gospel. They need his word. Dulwich.

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South London. What does Dulwich need? His word. Rich and poor. What do your colleagues need? What do the kids at the schools need?
His word. If we have compassion. On people in London. What should we do? Give them the gospel. Give them his word.
judgment.! two things. It is a picture of his provision to satisfy every need of his people, and then abundantly. So what does that mean? Well, if God is our shepherd, if God is your shepherd, if God is your shepherd, what do you think you will ever lack?
If he's given himself on the cross, what good thing will he withhold from you now, and then forever? There's plenty of job uncertainty in the city. Round after round of redundancies, people never feel safe. For the Christian, there's no need to worry. Jesus will provide one way or the other. Some of us here worried about the future, not the far future, but weeks, months, what's going to happen? He will provide. He will provide in this life and the next.
[30:13] You will have no lack with Jesus. He's given you himself. He's not going to hold anything back. And then provision forever for the body and soul, not just in this life, but then in the kingdom of God, I think the eternal feast is pictured here. The eternal feast that we are looking and hoping in, in the kingdom of God, as we follow Jesus in this life.

So two things as we close, two implications of this. Number one, open your eyes to see who Jesus is.
And then secondly, lay your life entirely in his hands, the great provider. It may be that someone needs to do that freshly today.
Filled with worries. Yes, following Jesus, but filled with worries. Just need to lay your life entirely in his hands again, the great provider.
It may be that someone needs to do that for the first time. Father, we thank you for Jesus, the very great shepherd, the very great provider.
[31:47] Open our eyes to see who he really is. Thank you for the Lord and God of the Old Testament. And therefore, how safe we are with him. Thank you that he has provided for our deepest need of forgiveness and peace with you forever through his death.

Thank you that he provides for our ongoing need of his word to guide and lead through this life. The gospel. And thank you that he provides for every need now and forever.
And for that glorious, breathtaking hope of the feast that will never end in his new kingdom that is one day to come.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

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